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THE CULTURAL POSITION OF THE BAHAMAS IN CARIBBEAN ARCHAEOLOGY *

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THIS paper is concerned with the prehistory of the Bahama Islands, British West Indies, an archipelago stretching in a 600-mile arc from the southeast Florida coast opposite West Palm Beach to within 60 miles of the northern coasts of Cuba and Hispaniola (Fig. 1). The Turks and Caicos groups, although politically administered from Jamaica, belong both geologically and archaeologically in the archipelago and are therefore included in this report.

The purpose of the present survey is to clarify the relationships of pre-Columbian Bahamian culture to neighboring regions. Before any clarification can be made, however, it is first necessary to outline briefly the archaeological findings in the islands, for no complete survey has yet been published. The writer is currently preparing such a survey based upon as extensive historical, ethnographic, and archaeological information as possible (Granberry 1955a), but for the purposes of this report the few statements made should suffice.

Little archaeological work has been done in the Bahamas. There has been almost no interest on the part of local inhabitants in the prehistory of their islands, and archaeologists from outside have usually been limited in their work by time factors. This, combined with the difficulty of reaching many of the islands without great expense, has meant a lack of thorough

site surveys and excavations. Provided ample time did present itself and finances were forthcoming the task of conducting a survey would still be no simple one, for the majority of sites located so far have been in caves, with which most islands are literally riddled. Many of these caves have been dug for their rich deposits of cave-earth, used as fertilizer, making the chances of finding a rewarding site very slim indeed.

Eight surveys, however, have been conducted: one in 1887 by W. K. Brooks (1888), one in 1912 by Theodore De Booy (1912, 1913), one in 1934 by Froelich Rainey (1934, 1940, 1941), two in 1936-37 and 1947 by Herbert W. Krieger (1937; Smithsonian Institution 1938, 1948), two by John M. Goggin (1939) in 1937 and 1952, and one by the present author in 1955 (1955b). So far as is known the only actual excavations undertaken were those at Gordon Hill Caves on Crooked Island by Rainey (1934: 20-2; 1940: 152) and several in the central islands by Krieger (Smithsonian Institution 1938: 28-9; 1948: 16-17). Nevertheless, adequate surface collections were made in most of the major islands, and these, in conjunction with smaller collections in Nassau, the United States, Britain, and Europe, furnish enough material to make a tentative statement on the archaeology of the islands possible.

A total of 61 major sites has been located. Many, however, are represented by only a few specimens and consequently give little satisfac-

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tion when treated singly. It is only through a composite examination of all the sites that any cultural reconstruction can be attempted. Even then, because of the general paucity of specimens and lack of documented excavations, the picture as presented here is undeniably a partial one.

Of the 61 major sites only 16 represent open villages. The remaining are all cave sites, either burial, habitation, or petroglyph. Productive sites are concentrated in the Caicos rather than farther to the north, and 15 of the village sites are found here. This concentration is presumably a result both of denser prehistoric population and of more thorough archaeological work in the southern islands than in the north. It was in the Turks and Caicos that De Booy conducted the bulk of his research in 1912 for the Museum of the American Indian. All areas of the archipelago have been surveyed cursorily for sites except the Exuma chain, Great Exuma, the Jumento Cays, and the Anguila Isles.

Ceramic and nonceramic specimens recovered from Bahamian sites show marked similarities to artifacts from north Haiti as defined by Rouse (1941: 54-91, 113-40, Pls. 7-24, 27-34). This is particularly true of stone celt types and the 2 predominant ceramic styles, which have accordingly been called Meillac and Carrier as on mainland Haiti.

The typical reconstructed Meillac specimen from the Bahamas is a vessel, probably a bowl, of moderate size with a large aperture. It seems to have been round or boat-shaped. The bottom contours are unknown. The bowl sometimes bears a red clay slip, and the walls are thick and only moderately polished. The surface of the vessel is hard, and there may be a narrow shoulder, turning not far below the lip. The lip itself is either round with a straight rim or beveled with a slightly flaring rim. The surface is usually not decorated, though in some instances it may have an incised design on the shoulder just below the lip, usually a crosshatch design which extends around the

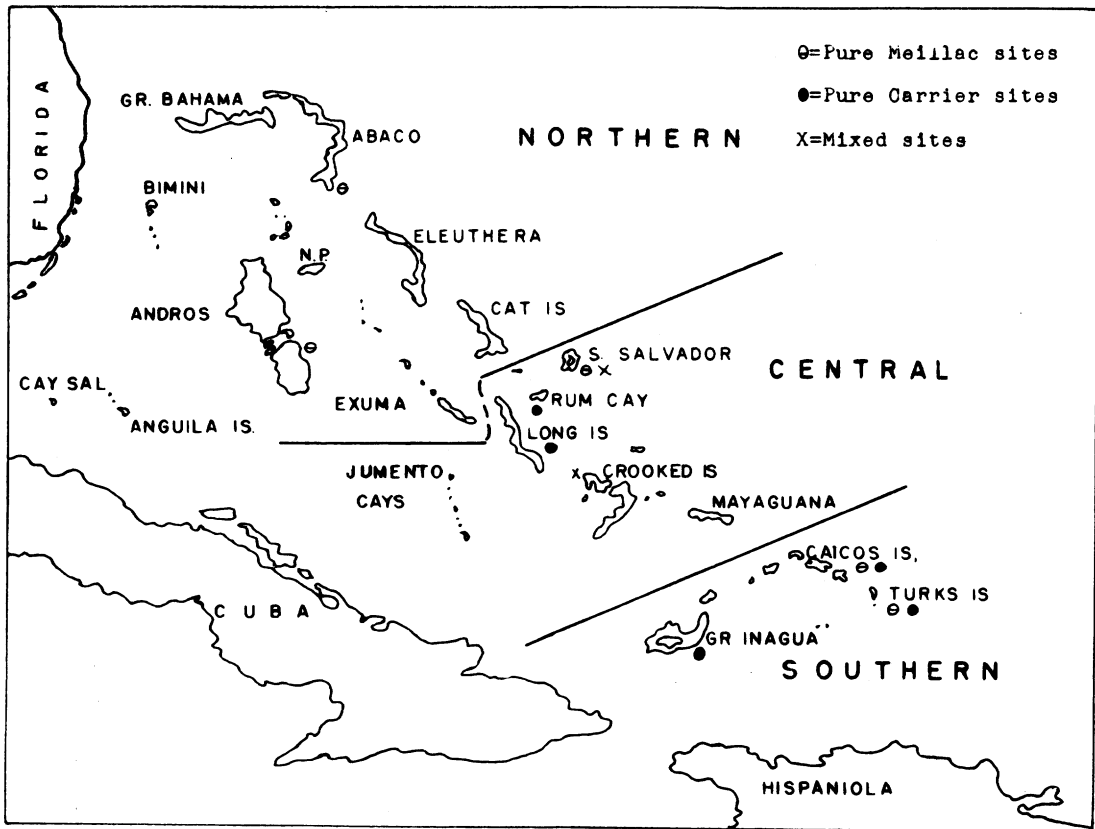


FIG. 1. Distribution of pure and mixed sites in the Bahamas, Turks, and Caicos.

vessel. Occasionally lugs in the form of an animal's face occur on opposite ends of the vessel. All but a few of the specimens bear signs of use as cooking pottery.

The typical reconstructed Carrier specimen from the Bahamas, again cooking pottery, is a thick-walled bowl, the exact body shape and bottom form of which are uncertain. It is, however, probably round or boat-shaped. The surface is soft in comparison with Meillac pottery. Lips are round, and shoulders rarely occur. Decoration, which is rare, is usually curvilinear rather than straight line as on Meillac specimens. Zoomorphic head lugs representing the features of a bat are common, usually on both ends of the vessel. Carrier specimens never have a slip. On the whole these sherds are of a finer quality of material and workmanship than are Meillac sherds.

The Ostiones-like ceramic material present in the Anadel and San Juan sites in the Dominican Republic (Rouse 1951: 256), in early Meillac sites in Haiti (Rouse 1941: 18-25, Pl. 25), and coexistent with Meillac in Jamaica (DeWolf 1953: 237), does not occur in the Bahamas. There are, however, 4 additional distinctive styles from the Bahamas. None can be placed as a subtype of Bahamian Meillac or Bahamian Carrier, and only two can be adequately described at the present stage of research. One is defined from numerous body sherds from the central and southern islands. They are probably from round bowls and are crudely made, soft, and friable. They are characterized by fabric impressions from a twined material. The style is well represented and, in the Caribbean, is unique to the Bahamas. The other style is represented by only 5 rim sherds, all quite large, from the Caicos. They are very hard, heavily grit tempered with quartz particles, and represent large vessels, round in shape with large apertures, outflaring rims, and rounded lips. All the sherds are decorated by bold incision, which superficially resembles paddle stamping. Designs are geometric, consisting of intricate combinations of straight and wavy lines. Neither of these styles has any obvious affiliation with neighboring regions.

The Bahamian Meillac and Bahamian Carrier styles seem to be areal variations of those styles in north Haiti, and the majority of cultural contact was certainly with that region. In fact, direct trade between the 2 areas is highly probable, for most stone artifacts so far

recovered are made from igneous rock, occurring in Haiti but not in the Bahamas, and ceramic specimens from the Turks and Caicos are tempered with particles of quartz, which is not found in the islands. The presence of stone effigy celts, *zemis* or spirit images of stone and wood, and *duhos* or wooden stools strengthens the likelihood that Bahamian culture patterns were of Haitian origin, for all were characteristic of north Haiti (Rouse 1948: 535-6). It seems without doubt, therefore, that they were also Arawak in nature. Columbus' statement that the speech of the Lucayans, as the natives of the Bahamas were called, was understood in Arawak-speaking Cuba and Hispaniola gives us further reason to assume an Arawak origin and content of Bahamian culture (Columbus 1893: 42-3, 46, 52, 64 and following). The accounts of early Spanish chroniclers bear out these similarities (Las Casas 1877 Vol. 1: 222-32; Anghiera 1944: 501-14).

There are a few indications of cultural affiliation with Cuba. While the Bahamian Meillac is much more like the Haitian style of the same name, it does in some instances bear strong resemblance to Cuban styles in decorative motif, particularly to the Baní of eastern and central Cuba (Rouse 1942: 164) and to a similar unnamed style from the Cayo Ocampo and Cantabria sites near Cienfuegos in south-central Cuba (Morales Patiño 1947: 122).

Suggestions of connection between Bahamian culture and cultures of the Southeastern United States, particularly Florida, at present seem unfounded. Much has been made in the past of Anghiera's statement (1944: 501) that the Florida Indians visited the Bahamas to hunt doves and of the fact that both the Florida Indians and the Lucayans exhibited artificially deformed crania (Brooks 1888: 215-22; Gower 1927: 30), but these factors in themselves are hardly conclusive enough to warrant the theory that the 2 areas were *culturally* affiliated. The unfortunately stressed similarity of carved designs on some Bahamian *duhos* to paddle-stamped designs on Southeastern pottery types, discussed by Holmes (1894: 73-4), is not very close and, again, is not conclusive evidence. General similarities between Southeastern paddle-stamped specimens bearing a check design and the fabric-impressed sherds from the central and southern Bahamas are much too vague to propose any link between the 2 styles. To this writer the only plausible indication of

cultural connection between the Bahamas and the mainland of North America is the occasional resemblance in decorative motif of several Meillac sherds from the southern Bahamas and some sherds of Surfside Incised from south Florida (Goggin and Sommer 1949, Pl. 3 *a-e*; Rouse 1949: 131, Fig. 8). The likenesses mentioned here pertain primarily to form — boat-shaped vessels with wedge-shaped lugs on each end — and seem more basic to style definition than those discussed by Holmes. Even these postulated connections, however, are very general, and much more excavation in the Bahamas and comparative examination of specimens from south Florida and the islands is called for before a positive statement can be made. The major cultural affiliations of Bahamian culture were with north Haiti; beyond that point it would be hazardous to go at present.

An examination of sites and artifacts from the viewpoint of distribution in space (Fig. 1) brings to light 2 immediately discernible facts. One is the unusual spacing of ceramic styles in the archipelago; the second the distribution of pure and mixed sites defined from ceramic content.

Nonceramic artifacts of all types are widely dispersed. Ceramic specimens, on the other hand, show a definite scheme. Meillac sherds are found from Great Abaco south through Grand Turk, while Carrier specimens are found only as far north as San Salvador, Rum Cay, and Long Island. The divergent styles mentioned earlier occur only as far north as San Salvador. Furthermore, the southern and central islands are characterized by the presence of cave petroglyphs, monolithic axes, duhos, and a great many zemis, which are relatively infrequent farther north. The irregular stone hammer-grinder seems to be limited to the northern islands down to Eleuthera.

The northern islands from Grand Bahama south to Eleuthera and Andros, perhaps as far as Cat Island and Great Exuma, have only the Meillac style of pottery. From San Salvador, Rum Cay, and Long Island south through Grand Turk both Meillac and Carrier specimens, as well as several unique styles, are found. The over-all quality of the pottery from the southern islands is superior to that from the central and northern islands, and ceramic speci-

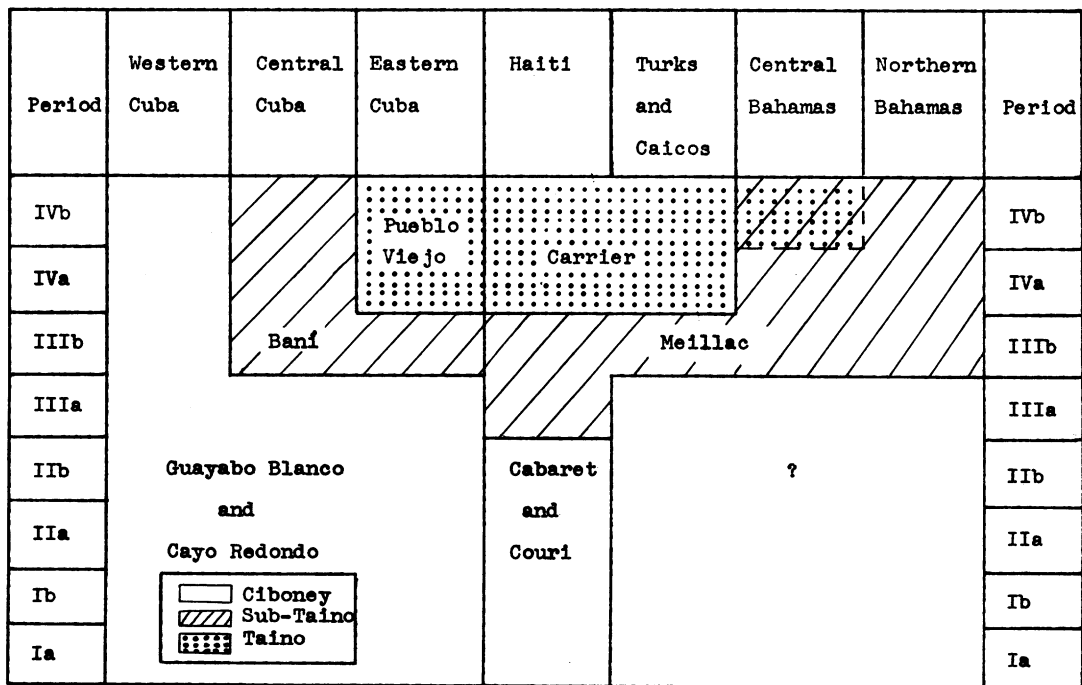


FIG. 2. Distribution of cultures, ceramic styles, and preceramic phases in the Bahamas, Turks, Caicos, and neighboring regions, through time (after Rouse 1951: 251).

mens of all styles from the southern portion of the archipelago exhibit the most complex decorative techniques and motifs.

Examination of pure and mixed sites, referring to Meillac and Carrier styles, is rewarding. As mentioned above pure Meillac sites, and only Meillac sites, are found from Great Abaco south to Andros. From San Salvador, Rum Cay, and Long Island south to but not including Great Inagua and the Turks and Caicos, pure sites of both Meillac and Carrier are found, as well as mixed sites containing specimens of both styles. On Great Inagua and in the Turks and Caicos no mixed sites are found, but both pure Meillac and pure Carrier sites occur.

From this spatial examination of sites and artifacts we may postulate the following division of the area without reference to temporal complexes. The islands from Grand Bahama and Great Abaco south, probably including Great Exuma and Cat Island, may be called a *Northern* subarea. The Meillac style was apparently in continuous occupation until the extinction of the Lucayans in the early and middle 1500's. The area is also characterized by a paucity of ceremonial objects and the absence of petroglyphs. The islands from San Salvador, Rum Cay, and Long Island south to Great Inagua and the Turks and Caicos may be called a *Central* or *Transitional* subarea. The Meillac style was in occupation for some time, but Carrier influence was beginning to make itself felt by the time of European intervention. In a very few cases the Meillac style seems to have been replaced by the Carrier, but usually, as at the Gordon Hill site on Crooked Island, both styles were coexistent or closely followed one by the other in the same site. The subarea is characterized not only by a basic Meillac style with Carrier encroachment, but also by the presence of ceremonial objects and petroglyphs. Great Inagua and the Turks and Caicos constitute a *Southern* subarea. The Meillac style was replaced almost in toto by the Carrier at some time not long before European movement into the region. All sites are pure sites, and both Meillac and Carrier styles are represented. The area is also characterized by the presence of many ceremonial objects and of petroglyphs.

A further distinction can be made among these 3 subareas. In the Northern area only cave sites are known, both burial and habita-

tion. In the Central area cave sites (burial, habitation, and petroglyph) and open village sites occur, the former predominating. In the Southern area the majority of sites are open villages, although cave sites are found. Furthermore, cave sites in the northern islands are primarily habitation sites, while those in the central and southern islands were generally used for burials or as "shrines," the latter being characterized by petroglyphs.

No preceramic sites are known in the Bahamas. Indications of Ciboney, or at least pre-Arawak, occupation, however, are present in the form of shell gouges, shell middens reported from the northern islands by Krieger (1937: 98), and, possibly, undeformed crania, again from the northern islands. The latter specimens are reported to have been sent to the American Museum of Natural History from the Smith Hill Cave site on south Andros (Goggin 1952 field notes: 7-8), but were apparently never received (Harry L. Shapiro, personal communication). These indications are obviously speculative. In June, 1955, the author made a reconnaissance survey of North and South Bimini in the hopes of clarifying the question of pre-Arawak occupation, but no sites were located (Granberry 1955b). It seems quite possible that an investigation of all the islands lying closest to Florida and Cuba may reveal more information.

Since Bahamian culture was derivative from north Haiti, and since there are no definite preceramic or pre-Arawak sites in the islands, we may assume for the present that they were first settled by Arawak peoples in Period III in Antillean archaeology, as defined by Rouse (1951: 251). This period represents the first appearance of pottery in north Haiti and saw the emergence there of the Meillac style (Fig. 2). It has not been assumed that this style spread immediately to the Bahamas, but rather, as in the case of Cuba, during the middle of Period III, called IIIb by Rouse (1951: 251). The reasons for this assumption are the comparative infrequency of a red slip on the Bahamian Meillac sherds, the absence of any coloring matter in the paste of these sherds, and the presence of incised lines on outside ridges, all characteristics of the late Meillac in Haiti (Rouse 1939, Chart 6). The complete absence of any Ostiones-like sherds, frequently coexisting with early Meillac in Haiti and Jamaica, may strengthen this suggestion. The

Meillac style spread throughout the entire archipelago, since specimens are found from Great Abaco to Grand Turk.

In Period IVa the Meillac style was largely replaced by the Carrier in north Haiti (Rouse 1951: 251), the latter spreading relatively soon to the Turks and Caicos, where it must have been well established by the time of Spanish arrival in the New World, judging from the frequency of Carrier sites. During protohistoric times, Period IVb, the Carrier style probably began spreading to the central islands, where it had not effected a complete replacement of Meillac techniques by the 1520's and 1530's when Spanish slave raids depopulated the islands. This spread of the Carrier style was accompanied by other traits, primarily ceremonial in nature, and perhaps by the introduction of agriculture, which we know was practiced as far north as Long Island (Las Casas 1877 Vol. 1: 227). The ceremonial traits — zemis, duhos, petroglyphs, stone effigy celts, monolithic axes — are most typical of Taino culture on mainland Haiti (Rouse 1948: 525, 535-9). The Meillac style, and the absence of an extensive ceremonial complex, are typically Sub-Taino on the mainland (Rouse 1948: 508, 516, 521). Bahamian culture was then basically Sub-Taino, with an overlay of Taino traits in the southern and central islands, introduced relatively late in pre-Columbian times.

We are left with 2 alternatives in the question of Taino penetration into the Bahamas. Such a movement might have represented either a physical migration of peoples or simply diffusion of techniques. In the case of the Turks and Caicos it seems highly probable that there was an actual migration of Indians into the region, borne out by close correspondence of Haitian and southern Bahamian traits, the use of quartz temper in pottery, and the existence of many pure Carrier sites. Although the movement continued on into the central islands, it is felt that most Taino traits there were probably the result of diffusion rather than of physical displacement.

Summary. Culturally the Bahamas were a peripheral Sub-Taino region throughout pre-Columbian times, showing close relationship to mainland Haiti. Ceramic styles were derivative from north Haitian styles and were somewhat less complex than those on the mainland. In Period IV, late prehistoric and early historic times, the people of the southern islands were

joined, amalgamated with, or replaced by users of Taino traits from Haiti. This same intervention penetrated the central islands briefly, but apparently never reached the northern islands. While the northern islands remained basically Sub-Taino through Periods III and IV, the southern islands might be said to have followed about the same path as northern Haiti, and Rouse (1951: 261, Fig. 3) is fully justified in placing them in the Windward Passage area with Haiti.

Evidences of Antillean-Southeastern United States prehistoric relationships via the Bahamas are few. They have been carefully summarized by Gower (1927) and Rouse (1949). There are no cases of similarity between Bahamian and Southeastern United States culture traits which can be said to indicate a definite connection between the 2 areas. The matter is still a void, to date filled only with several questionable similarities.

There is very little data, positive or negative, concerning the presence of the Ciboney, or any pre-Arawak or preceramic culture, in the Bahamas. Periods I and II of Antillean prehistory must remain a question mark in the Bahamas for the present.

As is still unfortunately so in most peripheral regions in the Americas, the Bahamas are almost untouched and might well bear more attention, particularly for a possible solution to the question of Ciboney origin.

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